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*Mary and Jim Semans,
North Carolinians*



by W. Kenneth Goodson



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NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
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NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
H. G. Jones, General Editor

No. 1. *An Evening at Monticello: An Essay in Reflection* (1978)
by Edwin M. Gill

No. 2. *The Paul Green I Know* (1978)
by Elizabeth Lay Green

No. 3. *The Albert Coates I Know* (1979)
by Gladys Hall Coates

No. 4. *The Sam Ervin I Know* (1980)
by Jean Conyers Ervin

No. 5. *Sam Ragan* (1981)
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No. 7. *Gertrude Sprague Carraway* (1982)
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No. 8. *John Fries Blair* (1983)
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by Georgia Carroll Kyser and William Brantley Aycock

No. 10. *William S. Powell, North Carolina Historian* (1985)
by David Stick and William C. Friday

No. 11. "Gallantry Unsurpassed" (1985)
edited by Archie K. Davis

No. 12. *Mary and Jim Semans, North Carolinians* (1986)
by W. Kenneth Goodson

*Mary and Jim Semans,
North Carolinians*



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "W. Kenneth Goodson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "G" at the end.

by W. Kenneth Goodson

*Together with Proceedings of a Banquet on the Occasion of the Presentation
of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1986*

Chapel Hill
NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.
1986

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An Evening with Mary and Jim Semans

On the evening of May 22, 1986, nearly 250 friends and relatives attended a reception and banquet in the Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill, honoring Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans and James Hustead Semans on the occasion of their acceptance of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1986. The master of ceremonies was Dr. H. G. Jones, curator of the North Carolina Collection and secretary-treasurer of the North Caroliniana Society, and the award was presented by Archie K. Davis, president of the Society. The main speaker was Dr. W. Kenneth Goodson, retired bishop of the United Methodist Church, who also introduced Mary Trent Jones and James D. Semans for a few words about their parents. The entire proceedings, including the acceptance remarks by Mary and Jim Semans, are published in this the twelfth number of the North Caroliniana Society Imprints series.



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THE NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY

honors

MARY and JIM SEMANS

Carolina Inn

Thursday, May 22, 1986

The Master of Ceremonies

Dr. H. G. Jones, Secretary of the Society

Introduction of Head Table

Dinner

The Address

Bishop W. Kenneth Goodson

Retired Bishop of the Methodist Church

(with perhaps a surprise or two)

The Presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award

by

Archie K. Davis, President of the Society

The Acceptances

Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans

and

James Hustead Semans

The North Caroliniana Society,
in recognition of their public service and
of their promotion, enhancement, and preservation
of the literature and culture of our state,
presents its
North Caroliniana Society Award
to
MARY DUKE BIDDLE TRENT SEMANS
and
JAMES HUSTEAD SEMANS
May 22, 1986

Archie K. Davis
Archie K. Davis
President

H. G. Jones
H. G. Jones
Secretary-Treasurer



Archie K. Davis, president of the Society, poses in top photograph with Mary and Jim Semans. At bottom the Semanses greet William and Ida Friday, recipients of the award in 1984, while Archie Davis looks on. (All photos by Jerry W. Cotten.)



At top Mary Semans chats with Bishop W. Kenneth Goodson, the main speaker, and his wife Martha; in the background Jim Semans speaks to William A. Johnson of Lillington. At bottom the Semanses engage in conversation with son-in-law James Parker Jones.



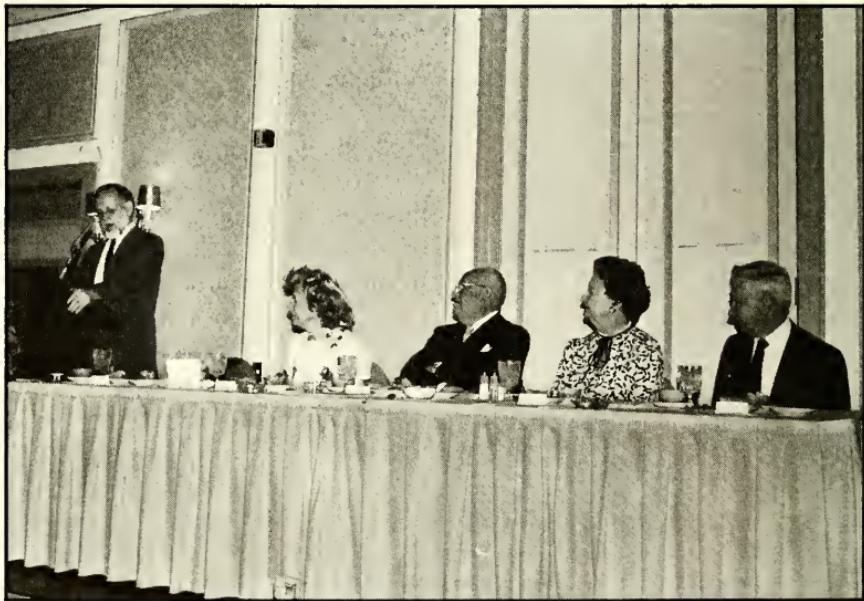
Ebullient Mary Semans shares a story at top with John Piva, Jr., (left) of Duke University and Douglas Zinn of the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation. At bottom Asa T. Spaulding (right) greets former chief justices Susie Sharp and William H. Bobbitt.



Mrs. J. Carlyle Sitterson (right) converses at top with former chief justice Susie Sharp, and at bottom she joins (left to right) Representative John T. Church of Henderson, Edward L. Rankin, Jr., of Concord, and Ivey L. Clayton of Raleigh.



At top William McWhorter Cochrane, Democratic staff director of the U.S. Senate Rules Committee, talks with Layne Baker (left) and Penelope Wilson; at bottom are George B. Tindall, UNC historian, and Mattie U. Russell, retired manuscripts curator at Duke University.



At the head table during the awards banquet were, left to right (at top) Virginia Waldrop Powell, Archie K. Davis, Martha Ann Goodson, James H. Semans, and H. G. Jones; and (at bottom) Jones, Mary Semans, Bishop W. Kenneth Goodson, Mary Louise Davis, and William S. Powell.



Posing at top prior to the dinner are Bishop W. Kenneth Goodson, Mary Trent Jones, James D. Semans, Archie K. Davis, and H. G. Jones, all speakers of the evening; at bottom President Davis presents the North Caroliniana Society Award to the Semanses.



At top Mary and Jim Semans accept congratulations from friends; and at bottom they pose with their family. At left are grandson Charlie Lucas, son James Semans, and daughter Barbara Kimbrell; at right are daughters Mary Jones and her husband James P. Jones, Sally Harris and her husband Kenneth Harris, and Jenny Koortbojian.



DR. H. G. JONES, Master of Ceremonies:

Friends of Mary and Jim Semans: Welcome to “Duke Night” in Chapel Hill.

In addition to the other pleasures of this event, I am particularly happy tonight, as a holder of a Duke degree, to be for the first time in twelve years with a *majority* on the UNC campus. I should caution you, however, that I have no influence with our traffic police who seem to delight in ticketing automobiles bearing Duke bumper stickers, especially those reading “DUKE—*The* University of North Carolina.”

Among the essential details in preparing for this evening, one of the most difficult was persuading the university printer to darken the blue ink for the printed programs—a color, he insisted, that is *never* used on the south side of New Hope Creek.

But this is a special night, and even Blue Devils proclaim themselves Tar Heels—appropriate compensation, I might add, for the millions of Tar Heels (using the term to designate *all* North Carolinians) who so proudly followed Coach K’s team to the finals of the NCAA in March. And, of course, there are no greater Tar Heels (again using the term in its universal sense) than our honorees.

Somehow, in all of our planning details, Mary and Jim Semans apparently were not told of one of the North Caroliniana Society’s hallowed traditions—that even honorees must pay for their own dinner. Rather than risk a confrontation at the head table, however, we sent out a call for help, and it came from Upperville, Virginia. Mary and Jim, you will *not* have to go to the cafeteria and bring your trays into the ballroom, for you are dinner guests tonight of your friends, Mr. and Mrs. John D. deButts, who send their congratulations and love.

Like them, many of your other friends have expressed their regrets for schedule conflicts. Just a sample: Frank Borden Hanes, a member of our board of directors, sends congratulations to the Semanses “who have done so much for the state”; Walter Spearman is playing the ninety-seven-year-old “Nonno” in *The Night of the Iguana*; Jonathan Williams says “Their devotion to the cultural betterment of North Carolina continues to amaze”; Buffie Ives is in Illinois, where she has an interest

in a governor's race (provided her nephew finds a party to run with); and Terry Sanford, who has an interest in another office, has fled the country—presumably temporarily. But in this busy month of May, Mary and Jim, nearly 250 of your friends are here to spend this evening with you and to express their gratitude for your contributions to our native and your adopted state.

Before allowing you to proceed with your dinner, let me take care of the obligatory niceties. The North Caroliniana Society prefers to put the important people in the audience and reserve the head table for people whom you might not otherwise recognize. Will the audience withhold applause until all have been presented and will those recognized remain standing until our guests of honor have been presented.

On my extreme left, our vice-president, the distinguished state historian, who last week graded his *final* final examination papers, Professor William S. Powell, and on the opposite end his strong support, Virginia Powell.

Next to Virginia, the president of the North Caroliniana Society, our perpetual student at the University of North Carolina, Archie K. Davis, and in the other direction, his strong support, Mary Louise Davis.

Next to Mary Louise, our speaker of the evening, Dr. W. Kenneth Goodson, bishop emeritus of the United Methodist Church, and in the opposite direction his strong support, Martha Ann Goodson.

And finally, will you join in welcoming these elevated people, but especially, our guests of honor, Mary and Jim Semans.

In the audience are several of Mary and Jim's children, and will you follow the same procedure for greeting them: Mary and Jim Jones, Sally and Ken Harris, Barbara Kimbrell, Jenny Koortbojian, and James D. Semans. And with us is one grandchild, Charlie Lucas.

Of the eight previous recipients of our North Caroliniana Society Award, Paul Green and Sam Ervin have passed on; Gertrude Carraway and John Fries Blair were unable to join us; but the others are here: Albert Coates, 1979; Sam Ragan, 1981; Bill and Ida Friday, 1984; and Bill Powell, 1985.

At each table is a sheet from a guest book. Will each of you please sign at this time and let the sheets zigzag to the far end of the table, where a member of our staff will pick them up and combine them for presentation to Mary and Jim.

Now, grateful as we all are for the blessings of this day, for the couple whom we honor, and for the food and fellowship before us, please visit with those around you and proceed with your dinner. We will be back for dessert.



[Dinner followed.]



DR. JONES (continued):

The North Caroliniana Society seeks service, not publicity, and its members are elected on the basis of what they have *already* done for North Carolina. The Society therefore takes very seriously its identification each year of a citizen—this year two—for recognition. Its award fills a gap in statewide recognition of broad cultural contributions, for though the Governor's North Carolina Awards have categories for fine arts and literature, there is none for the encouragement, promotion, enhancement, preservation, and teaching of the unique heritage of our state. Every year we have a ballroom full of people who qualify for such recognition, but we believe that the previous recipients—Green, Coates, Ervin, Ragan, Caraway, Blair, the Fridays, and Powell—taken together reveal the unwritten criteria against which nominees are measured. In each name we find an unapologetic devotion to our cultural heritage and a profound commitment to service to our fellow North Carolinians. Tonight we add two illustrious names to that honor roll.

Each member of this audience can testify to the qualifications of our 1986 joint recipients. The speakers on this platform simply represent you in pointing to just a few of their contributions to North Carolina.

I first came to know Mary Semans when she accepted the chairmanship of the Executive Mansion Fine Arts Commission, the brainchild of First Lady Jeanelle Moore, who is with us tonight. As director of the State Department of Archives and History, I was officially an advisor to the commission, but in reality I was a student of Mary Semans. Having watched her transform the interior of the formerly drafty 1890s prisoner-built structure into a warm, hospitable home for our first families, I do not find it surprising at all that her leadership of the commission has been eagerly continued by all of the subsequent governors, regardless of political party. Long may her good taste reign at 200 North Blount Street.

In the early '70s, strong sentiment emerged for a state historic site commemorating North Carolina's number one crop and its industry, tobacco, and jockeying began between several communities for the distinction. I knew from the beginning that only one site really qualified, and it was not even being discussed. With a carefully prepared proposal in hand and with the complicity of Nick Pond and Bob Booth of the Durham Chamber of Commerce, I accepted an invitation to lunch at the lovely Semans home. By the time lunch was over, what I thought was *my* plan was *their* plan, and before the end of the afternoon Mary had talked President Terry Sanford into supporting the donation (to the State Department of Archives and History) of the Washington Duke Homestead, the birthplace of the modern tobacco industry. The trustees approved the transfer, the Durham County legislative delegation persuaded the General Assembly to provide development funds, the Tobacco History Corporation was formed to elicit private support, and the Duke Homestead State Historic Site today stands as an example of cooperation between government and public spirited citizens like Mary and Jim Semans. That is the North Carolina way of preserving our cultural heritage.

Finally, I continue to marvel at the way Mary and Jim saved me from a potential political and professional holocaust. The law at that time placed in the director of the Department of Archives and History the responsibility for selecting an artist, for having the governor's official portrait painted and hung, and, not inconsequentially, for raising the funds for the project. The General Assembly, incidentally, had deliberately placed this responsibility on the Archives and History director rather than on the Art Museum director because, legislators said, they wanted the picture to "look like the governor." This was a cruel burden upon me, a historian with no real knowledge of art, but I wasn't born yesterday. So I talked with Gover-

nor Scott, then appointed an advisory committee, the key members of which were Mary, Jim, and Charles W. Stanford, and off we went to New York to interview noted artists. When the governor expressed his preference for Daniel Greene, we all nodded in agreement and I sighed with relief. Dan Greene came to Raleigh and Haw River, the governor sat, the portrait was painted, and in good time the crated painting arrived at the Archives and History Building. Jim accepted the governor's invitation to be the featured speaker at a public unveiling before a joint session of the General Assembly.

Now, Jim Semans wasn't born yesterday either. He decided that before he prepared his address he wanted to peep at the portrait, so one afternoon he and I had our private unveiling of Governor Scott's portrait. The art critic that he is, Jim backed off to view the huge canvas. The historian that I am, I rushed up to see what the governor was holding in his right hand. It was a scroll, with some lettering upside down. Blocking Jim's view, I twisted my head to read the printed line. Upon straightening up, an awful thought struck me, and I quickly twisted again, then backed off in horror, muttering "It can't be! It can't be!" Jim, only slightly distracted by my antics, continued to view the portrait, and his expression was one of growing satisfaction. What he did not know at that moment was that I was envisioning a headline in the *News and Observer* something like "Jones Seeks Funding for Flawed Painting," for there on that scroll, upside down, were *not* the words "The Executive Department" but rather "The Execute Department."

According to my diary, it took Jim an hour and a half to calm me down. What to me was an absolute disaster—a misspelled word on my governor's portrait, still unpaid for—was to him an easily-correctable mistake, one that was taken care of at 10:45 the night before the public presentation when Dan Greene flew down, pulled some little brushes from a pouch, and correctly relettered "The Executive Department." The following morning Jim gave a splendid address, and the portrait made Bob Scott look better than he ever did before or since. Jim, Dan, and I kept our secret close to the vest until tonight, when we can add this footnote to history. Furthermore, in the confusion of reorganization legislation, we slipped through an amendment that authorized the Council of State to allocate funds for governors' portraits, and I didn't have to raise a penny. Jim, thank you for saving me from the ignominy of being responsible for a

misspelled word on the portrait that now hangs on the wall of the Executive Mansion, so beautifully decorated by Mary.



Now, Jim has written his autobiography, and I understand it will be published soon. We hope Mary will write hers. Having read Jim's manuscript, I know that each of you could add some splendid stories about him and his energetic Mary. Perhaps you have exchanged some of those stories at your table. For instance, get Harry Gatton to tell you about his discovery in faraway Finland that our Dr. James H. Semans is an international scholar of the *sauna*.

We chose for our speaker tonight a person who knows some *other* secrets about Mary and Jim Semans, dear friends for many years. Like them, he has a rich past, one devoted to service. A native of Salisbury, Dr. W. Kenneth Goodson has led a distinguished career in the ministry, the first quarter of a century of it here in North Carolina, serving pastorates in the Greensboro, Wadesboro, High Point, Charlotte, and Winston-Salem areas. In 1964, while beginning his fourth year as pastor of Centenary Methodist in Winston-Salem, he was elected a bishop of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church. For eight years he was bishop in Alabama, then in 1972 moved to Richmond to serve the Virginia Conference. Upon his retirement in 1980, he accepted an invitation to become bishop-in-residence for his alma mater, the Divinity School of Duke University, where he counsels, preaches, and "does a bit of teaching."

As one who heard this young man when he revisited his first pastorate, Oak Ridge Military Institute, I have the pleasure of being reunited with him tonight after thirty-five years and to present him with a challenging new text, the first chapter of Mary and Jim Semans. Bishop Goodson.





MARY AND JIM SEMANS

By W. Kenneth Goodson

For a little more than fifty years now I have been either preaching or delivering some kind of an address about the Gospel and the Church or about good people who have blessed my life and for whom I can say a word. Some of them have been easy to do, and some of them have been very difficult. Of all the occasions where this has been the order of the day, this occasion has been the most difficult for me—not difficult because of insufficient material but difficult because of a superabundance of material. It has not been difficult because I do not know the subjects well; it has been difficult because I know them so intimately and respect them both so highly.

Under the constraints of time I have had to pick and choose. What I pick and choose does not bother me, but what time does not allow me to pick and choose almost devastates me. They are both so great and so good and so completely honest that I have found it almost impossible to do this in a brief span.

Now, even before I make an attempt to praise Caesar and Mrs. Caesar, I interrupt this paper to bring you a delightful surprise in family testimony. I want to present two of their children for a brief word about their parents. The first is Mary Duke Trent, whom I present to you as Mrs. James Parker Jones. Mary is the eldest of the seven children.



MARY TRENT JONES:

When Archie Davis called to tell me about this dinner and to ask me to say a few things about Mother and Dad, my initial reaction was "horrors," for I hate to get up and speak in front of a crowd. I am definitely

not good at it. But all of you here tonight know how convincing Archie can be with his smooth manner and voice. I found myself saying that I would be glad to do it.

My next thought was, "How in the world could anyone in a few minutes cover all the things Mother and Dad have accomplished in the past 30 years?" I decided to talk to my sisters and brothers to get some ideas. We thought that a few stories would be the best way to tell you about these remarkable people.

As my sister Becky said, you can always depend on Mother and Dad. If someone asks them to do a favor of any kind, they will do it, and do it thoroughly. As a matter of fact, their problem is that they find it hard to say no. It always seems to us that they sit on boards of *hundreds* of institutions. They are always busy, yet they always give people the sense that they have all the time in the world to talk to them. They are so busy that I rarely call them because I never know when they will be home or where they are.

Becky, Sally, and I were in Durham about a month ago and went shopping with Mother. As we went from store to store, Mother went from phone to phone. She is a walking telephone directory. That particular day, as on many other occasions, she was writing a speech or some letters in the car while we were all talking. As you can see, she wastes no time.

Mother has boundless energy—much more than I. Our son Ben was down for his interview at Duke. When he returned home the next day, he said, "Do you know that Grandmama went to the grocery store at 11:00 P.M. and stayed up after I went to bed at 1:30 A.M.?" He was exhausted the next day; *Mother* was fine.

One night several years ago I was in Durham. I think Jenny was with me, and we yelled to find out where Mother was. It was about 11:30 P.M. We found her out on the terrace sweeping the leaves. Not many people we know stay up to watch the David Letterman Show; Mother does.

Mother and Dad are both dedicated to the arts, Duke University, Durham, and the state of North Carolina. They are known as kind and giving people. As their children, we are constantly amazed at the strange requests that are asked of them. Many years ago someone called and said she needed new false teeth and could Mother please pay for them. People have asked Mother to buy them furniture, contribute to weird organizations and help put them through school. She even finds it hard to say

no to door-to-door salesmen, especially people working their way through school. One time she bought some extremely sharp knives from a boy trying to pay for his college education and promptly cut her finger.

They are able to communicate with all types of people. All of their grandchildren think they are wonderful and love to visit with them. They know people all over the world. They see people they know in foreign cities as well as on ships and in airports. That's a big family joke—that we would be in Timbucktu and Mother would know someone. Two years ago we went to our oldest son's graduation from Woodberry Forest School. Mother knew more people there than we did.

The last story I will tell is one that Sally, Becky, Barbara, and I will never forget. This will truly illustrate just how committed and dedicated Mother is to any project she takes on. One summer after my father died, Mother decided we all needed to see New England. Keep in mind that there were four little girls, nine, eight, seven, and five years of age. Also travelling with us were Bethie, who lived with us and brought up not only Mother but all of us, and Granny Trent, my father's mother. Mother was the only driver. It sounds like a nightmare, doesn't it? We set out in a car that is no longer made and did not stay on the market very long—a Vagabond station wagon. We started north on the Skyline Drive. We had stopped one day at a scenic overlook. Granny stayed in the car. The next thing we knew, the brakes had slipped and there was Granny in the car with a look of sheer terror on her face. There were so many things to do and see on the trip and not enough time for everything. Mother would call out, "We just passed Longfellow's home" or "That was the House of Seven Gables." We have laughed about that trip ever since, but we *did* see New England, and without killing each other, too.

As Archie has said, these are truly remarkable people, who give outstanding service to organizations, their community and to their state.



BISHOP GOODSON (continued):

Thank you, Mary. Now it is my pleasure to present to you Mr. James Duke Biddle Trent Semans, the only son, who will say a few words about his parents.



JAMES D. SEMANS:

I think it's ironic that I've been asked to give a speech about my parents, since among some of my earliest memories are waking up and hearing them talking to each other over breakfast. What they were doing was reading speeches to each other—their own speeches—about their work in North Carolina.

I think Mom and Dad don't like to see themselves as *improving* North Carolina. I really think they believe that North Carolina is just there but that it just hasn't been *discovered* yet. They're just making sure that North Carolina's qualities and assets are *known*.

When we were younger, we used to spend summers in Italy with the North Carolina School of the Arts. I think it's interesting that what my parents were doing was not only exposing their own children to what all those very talented North Carolinians (and out-of-state students) could do but also exposing another country to some of what North Carolina had to offer culturally—and, of course, exposing all of us to the European world.

I think my parents' relationship with North Carolina is all about communication. And when I tell stories about them it strikes me that my stories are always about their going somewhere or giving a speech or talking about North Carolina or working for North Carolina.

For instance, we have a portrait of my parents from their early married days, and my mother is shown sitting on the floor writing a letter. It was something the portrait painter, who obviously wanted to catch her most natural pose, just couldn't ignore.

Dad worked hard on his Italian so he could talk about the School of the Arts. He used to start up conversations as often as possible, and he would jump into them by introducing my mother. He'd put his arm around her shoulders and say "and my wife," which in Italian is "e mia moglia." I was always a great mimic, and I caught onto this word "moglia," and I used to call Mom "the mole woman" just to make her laugh (we *were* children, remember). Of course we heard the Italian word often, since Dad never lost a chance to talk about the School of the Arts.

This shows how deeply my parents felt about us. They included us in as many of these events as possible and didn't shove us off to baby parties; we could *see* the world of adults. This didn't deny our childhood, but it did expose us to as much of their philosophy as possible.

Just to conclude: One thing my father always says is that although he was born in Pennsylvania, he *feels* like a North Carolinian now. Well, many of you may not know that although my mother grew up here, she was born in New York. I'm sure you'll all agree now that they have both earned the right to call themselves *North Carolinians*.



BISHOP GOODSON (continued):

I have had before me for days now the autobiography of James Hustead Semans, which will make marvelous reading when published, and a vita and a series of papers about and by Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans. I read them to get all the information I needed and became so involved in every page that I almost forgot to take any notes at all.

I will begin with Jim. Uniontown, Pennsylvania, was his home. He was the youngest of seven boys and one sister, so I immediately felt kinship with him for I, too, was the youngest of seven boys and one sister. He grew up as a normal boy as Mary did as a normal girl. Both of their fathers were industrialists and prosperous, and both of their fathers and both of their mothers had a keen interest in the education of their children. Thomas Breckenridge Semans, Jim's father, was determined that all eight of his children should receive a good education. There is no way to understand either of these people without understanding the strong family traditions that are in both of their lives. Jim expresses it interestingly. "I can hardly express the great exhilaration I have always felt about life. Early on I completely dedicated myself to a life of service with the inherent rewards that such a life brings."

There is a marvelous line in Jim's autobiography that I like. It says, "Developing a philosophy and a theme of life is a process much like weaving." So many of the strands of their lives, Jim and Mary's, are alike. Tradition played an important role in their lives. And also an early motto, and

I am sure it applied to both families: "Live up to your family name, not on it"—live up to your family name, not on it.

There is another quote that characterizes them both. Says Jim in his autobiography, "All my life I have looked for challenges." It can be said that both of them majored in careful planning as one of the chief themes in their lives. The one constant quest in their lives has been in the direction of affability—they are both people-oriented in everything they do.

At fifteen Jim made a decision to become a physician. "I really wanted to do something for the illness of mankind but all along I wanted to be a doctor of the human condition." What an ambition!

Jim was named Hustead after his father's business partner, Captain James Miller Hustead. I think you need to know that Captain Hustead was a prominent officer in the Union Army in the War Between the States or the "War of Northern Aggression." Can you imagine Archie Davis hosting a banquet in which one of the two honorees is named after a Union Army officer? If I had told Archie this earlier I would have saved myself hours of delightful research, and you might have missed this wonderful evening.

Family ties are very strong with both of the Semanses. And they speak and live in such a manner that reflects great credit upon their backgrounds. Jim's father was asked once, "How do you manage to get all these boys home for Christmas?" Charles, one of the brothers who was the family wag, spoke up. "It's perfectly simple. He just closes his checkbook, and we all come in on freight cars or in any way possible."

There was great harmony in both of their family backgrounds. And I am sure that the mother in both cases, as in all cases, was the great influence in that harmony. Jim's mother, Virginia Belle Smith Semans, once said, "We will have peace in this family if I have to fight for it."

Virginia Belle Smith Semans had eight children, and she wrote each one of them two letters a week. Can you believe that? Both my wife and our children made a choice, and they all chose AT&T.

Jim's autobiography begins with an introduction of the early years, like prep school at Lawrenceville and university at Princeton in the class of '32. Then medicine at Johns Hopkins followed by the war years and military service. Then a chapter on Atlanta where he opened his office for the practice of urology, and the greatest chapter of all—"Marriage and Duke University." The chapter on a second career is pretty much the story of the North Carolina School of the Arts. And it ends with a chapter

on reflections. True to the nature of both of them, the final chapter is entitled "Looking Forward."

Jim has always believed in destiny, and destiny has played a large part in his life. He was interested in teaching and in clinical research. Those were his ultimate goals in medicine. He received an invitation to come to Duke University for a lecture on his work with paraplegic patients during World War II. I quote his story: "I came to Duke, and I lectured, and I met Mary, the widow of Dr. Josiah Trent who had died four years earlier." Following Jim's lecture, a friend invited him to go to Mary's house to see a collection in medical history, which she and Dr. Trent had brought together. He confessed, "I never really saw it. My interest was immediately distracted." He had been overcome by human chemistry, which at the moment he could not handle. When he left the house, Mary asked his friend, "How many children does he have?" and the answer was, "Jim is not married." On his way back to Atlanta he could not get the picture of Mary out of his mind—blue dress, pearl earrings. He dreamed about them. He wrote a lovely thing in his story. "Meeting my wife was for me the most important event since birth." He had found the perfect partner for his life's pursuit. "Our aims were the same," he says, "the common quest for purpose and meaning in life."

Mary furnished four ready-made maids. Added to that three newborns arrived in time. Mary Biddle Duke Trent and James Hustead Semans married in Linden Court, which was the home of Mary Duke Biddle, Mary's mother, in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, on October 17, 1953, soon to be thirty-three years. Two great family lines and generations of traditions, some of them even unknown, have in this marriage become one. There was a common resolution made by those two, Jim and Mary, that "whatever we do, insofar as possible, we will do together as a team." What a team this has been, doing it all together but never for a moment compromising each other's individuality.

Then there is a chapter in Jim's book entitled "Second Career" in which he says, "Mary always wanted an orphanage." They found one in the North Carolina School of the Arts, a student body made up of young people who are away from home, who have amazing talents and needed to be "adopted" by someone whose talents were just as amazing. Jim and Mary completely saturated themselves with their interest in the North Carolina School of the Arts. Governor Sanford made Jim the first chairman of this board of trustees. The city of Winston-Salem pledged a million

dollars to get it started. The Z. Smith Reynolds and Hanes foundations gave a large part of it, and in a single day's campaign, which was led by Smith Bagley, they subscribed the rest of it. Phillip Hanes joined them in helping put it all together.

Then came Siena, the summer session for the students, primarily in Italy but now in Italy and Germany. You can't leave out the name Giannini. He was the professional in the arts, the guiding spirit who led the School of the Arts into what it has become.

Their interests, Jim and Mary's, cover the earth, from the professional to the personal. He had three professional interests. One was rehabilitation of those whose bodies were broken. I have been through McGuire Hospital in Richmond many times and have heard the cries for mercy. Jim heard, and he answered them. He is also interested in medicine's contribution in the field of human sexuality and has helped lift it from a time of taboo to a position of respected behavioral therapy. And his third interest was medical teaching and research. The last chapter in his book, the very title of which describes this man completely, is entitled "Looking Forward."



I have read Mary's commencement address to Duke University on May 8, 1983. To understand Mary Semans you have to understand her complete emotional attachment to a great university. She is the living link that connects Duke University with its history. Listen to her as she addresses the graduating seniors.

"I want to talk to you about compassionate living. I hope to lift you from the paycheck mentality; I would hope that you could develop the sense of the vicarious and that you will always remember that the real changes toward a better life will happen in the minds and hearts of the people. *You must work on the quality of life.* The key to all of life is the setting of priorities. Listen to me. I am pleading for an extraordinary dedication to humanity."

She has a right to plead for that because she has completely given herself to that for which she pleads.



What are the facts? Or, as the office says, "Do you have a vita?" You know Mary pretty well. She is the mother of seven children and fifteen grandchildren. That may seem like a lot of grandchildren, but if you had as many children working on the project as Mary has, you might have fifteen, too. She attended the Hewitt School in New York City and finished Duke University with a major in history. Her original plans were to be a pianist, and in preparation for that she studied piano for thirteen years. She is a distinguished member of the Duke University founding family, and if some uninformed person should ever ask you who was Washington Duke, you can reply that he was the great-grandfather of Mary Semans.

Her mother, Mary Duke Biddle, established the foundation which bears her name. Her father, Anthony Biddle, was a general in the United States Army, was an ambassador to the Benelux countries during World War II and became General Eisenhower's assistant at SHAPE and later Ambassador to Spain.

Mary was an elected member of the Durham City Council in 1951-55, the last two years of which she served as mayor pro tem. She is the holder of eight honorary degrees and is the recipient, with Dr. Semans, of the North Carolina Award for their contributions to the fine arts. She has been a trustee of the Duke Endowment since 1960 and is now the chairman of its board of trustees. If I read to you all of the institutions and organizations in which she is or has been a trustee or a member of the board, we would stand a chance of missing Carolina's opening game at Kenan Stadium.

A word about Jim's vita: Lawrenceville, Princeton, Johns Hopkins and professional societies, boards and appointments that simply baffle the imagination. In addition to all of that he is a member of three honorary societies, including Phi Beta Kappa.



Now, those are the facts. In my business, when you are either through or about to be through, you end up by saying, "And in conclusion . . ."

I want to conclude with four words, which, when understood in their deeper meaning, simply tell the story of Mary and Jim Semans. The first word is *sensitivity*. I do not know any human condition to which

they are not sensitive. Describing this woman and the man who shares her life is almost impossible. Their sensitivity and depth seem to have no end. I marvel at it.

The second word would be the word *compassionate*. I have seen this doctor of the human condition and this lovely woman who pleads for compassion go far beyond almost any restraint to give bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, or a word of hope to the hopeless.

The third word would be *caring*. I have never seen Mary Semans indifferent to anything good. And I have never known Jim to walk away from a human challenge. Somewhere there is bound to be a flaw because they are only human. But if there is, that flaw would be an over-indulgence of their own compassion.

The fourth word would be *loyalty*, a loyalty, a complete loyalty to everything that is good and clean and fine. Huxley once said about Kingsley, "The thing I like most about Kingsley is not that he preaches great sermons on Sunday but that he can believe in God on Monday."

What else can I say about Mary and Jim Semans. Only one other word—I am here tonight because I love them both.





DR. JONES:

Thank you, Bishop Goodson, for revealing to us the Mary and Jim Semans that you know so well. And thank you, Mary Jones and young James Semans, for sharing your sentiments about your parents.

We now come to the purpose of this gathering, but first let me make two brief announcements: First, there is an exhibit on Mary and Jim Semans in the elevator lobby outside the North Carolina Collection's temporary home in the rear of Wilson Library (we expect to occupy our completely renovated quarters by Christmas). We hope many of you will come to see the display. Second, the entire proceedings of this evening will be published in our signed, limited-edition *North Caroliniana Society Imprints* series, and those on our guest list tonight will receive a complimentary copy through the mails, probably by early fall.

Archie K. Davis has been characterized many ways, all of them to the discomfort of his modesty. His name is synonymous with service to his native state through his leadership in the business community, the Research Triangle Park, the National Humanities Center, his alma mater where we meet tonight, cultural causes of all types, and now his scholarship. (If I may reveal a secret, he has another book in his system.) For the past five years, we have had the great privilege of characterizing him simply as the president of the North Caroliniana Society. Tonight, we can also call him a longtime colleague and friend of the couple whom we honor. President Archie K. Davis.



ARCHIE K. DAVIS:

On behalf of the members of the North Caroliniana Society, and of this wonderful audience of admiring friends and loved ones, it is my high privilege to present the North Caroliniana Award to our dear friends Mary and Jim Semans.

Honors and recognition for public service, far above and beyond the call of duty, are not new to this distinguished couple. For years we have followed in their wake with awe and wonderment. Their thoughtful kindnesses and concern for others seem to know no bounds.

They are always on the go, always in search of someone to help or in support of some worthy cause. As patrons and benefactors, there are few in the arts and the humanities who have not felt the strong, helping hands of these two remarkable people. For nobility of purpose and absolute dedication to the well-being of their fellow man, they simply have no equals.

And yet, this does not tell the whole story of Mary and Jim Semans, for they share that rare gift of personality that is both illuminating and contagious. To seek inspiration is to seek their presence. To feel the warmth of genuine friendship is to be in their company. And to observe the joy that derives from purposeful commitment is to have the privilege of witnessing Mary and Jim in their daily pursuits—providing, of course, one can sustain the pace. If we should attempt to speak for an entire generation, we could only conclude that their lives of service are as a shining light—a gift of precept and example beyond compare.

So, Mary and Jim, in reading this inscription, you must know that I speak for all in your sight and far beyond. And we profoundly trust that you sense the feeling of admiration and abiding affection that attend this award, for words are simply inadequate.

*The North Caroliniana Society,
in recognition of their public service and
of their promotion, enhancement, and preservation
of the literature and culture of our state,
presents its
North Caroliniana Society Award
to
Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans
and
James Hustead Semans
May 22, 1986*





RESPONSE

by Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans

Jeanelle, do you think I'll get through this without crying?

Archie, Jim will have something special to say about you, and he will be speaking for both of us.

There will never be any way in which we can tell Bishop Goodson how much he means to us. He is our dear, dear friend. He showers joy on every life he touches, and he brings people together. Because of his goodness and his compassionate attitude toward everyone, he draws out the best in every person. It has been a privilege for Jim and me to work with him and to know him. He is just a magic friend. Thank you, Bishop Goodson.

And then H. G. To us H. G. has always symbolized the ultimate scholar, archivist, historian, traveler. We've had such a long-standing friendship with H. G., partly due to the wonderful opportunity to know him through the Scott family, and we have learned so much about this state from him. His service to North Carolina has made a permanent imprint on the state, and he symbolizes really the best that is in mankind. Thank you, H. G.

As I reminisce about North Carolina my memories are multifaceted. There were my wonderful relationships at Duke during the time of the Women's College and Dean Baldwin—a golden period of education for women. For me Duke Hospital-Medical School was synonymous with my dear Dr. Davison, its founding dean, who was almost a second father to me. There were friendships with the interns and residents, many of whom are now practicing in the state. Later serving on the city council I came in contact with people from every corner of our city and county and listening to their needs opened new worlds. In each area of interest I had a particular hero—for instance, in the city Mayor E. J. Evans was a real mentor.

I was introduced to the political world by my father who was eager for us to be aware of government and civic affairs from our childhood. He loved people, and watching him was an education in how to make friends and find out about people.

I think partly because of my grandfather and his involvement with black education I was eager to have friends in the black community. Through the husband of a schoolmate in New York City, who through his recording industry connections knew people throughout the country, I met the late Louis Austin, publisher of the *Carolina Times*, Durham's newspaper for black affairs. He, in turn, introduced me to the late Mr. C. C. Spaulding and his family, the late John Wheeler, and Rencher Harris; and my life was enriched enormously.

I feel very close to my grandparents' generation and, in a certain way, I talk to my grandmother now and then, thanking her for bringing me here to North Carolina. Then there was another father figure, the late Mr. W. R. Perkins, who wrote the indenture for Mr. Duke and indoctrinated me with the South. He encouraged me to come South and made most of the arrangements because my mother was ill. My second mother, Elizabeth Gotham, who helped rear me during my mother's illness, also encouraged me to move to North Carolina. She gave me care and support throughout my life. I met my first husband during his commencement weekend at Duke when I visited my grandmother. I was fifteen years old. Following his early medical training we made our home in North Carolina. After his untimely death our friends at Duke gave me so much support, and our four wonderful children—Mary, Sally, Rebecca, and Barbara—were so thoughtful of me. At their young ages their encouragement toward my finishing my degree and working in the public arena was extraordinary. Jim has been so supportive of my participation in causes, and I had the great advantage of following contemporary issues through the eyes of Jenny, James, and Beth, who cheered me on as a new generation unfolded.

My first opportunities to serve the state in official capacities came when Governor Hodges appointed me to the State Library Board and Governor Sanford, with the support of that marvelous Robert Lee Humber, put me on the board of trustees of the Museum of Art. Later Governor and Mrs. Moore gave me the opportunity to help with the Executive Mansion Fine Arts Committee. I'll never forget the moment of that appointment. Governors Scott, Holshouser, Hunt, and Martin all asked me to continue. I shall never be able to express the gratitude I feel for this

confidence. I feel the same way about my privilege in working with the University of North Carolina and the School of the Arts and President and Mrs. Friday.

The foundation work I'm involved in has been woven inextricably into the fabric of this state, and my appreciation for the privilege of participating in the family foundations is immeasurable. I have the late Thomas Perkins, my great Aunt Nanaline Duke, and Marshall Pickens to thank for bringing me to the Duke Endowment. These institutions embody the dream of my great-uncle, grandparents, and mother—dreams for correcting ills, building hospitals and churches, providing educational opportunities, and broadening artistic activities in North Carolina. This tradition of working for the arts was passed along to us by my mother who had had an opera career in her young days. There is another reason for this concentration, however; it is that in this plastic, impersonal, bureaucratic world the needs for beauty and self-expression are of real urgency. The pattern of our society has engendered a sense of alienation and loneliness. People feel isolated in a crowded world. One of the antidotes is the arts—for observation as well as participation. The arts lift and change moods, often creating a feeling of belonging—of pulling people outside themselves.

One of the most significant aspects of the arts in this state is that not only do the landmark organizations such as the museum, the symphony, and dance theatre receive support, but equally generous, enthusiastic backing is given the grass roots programs participated in by so many thousands of citizens in every walk of life. In other words, there is a total participation concept for the arts—just as there is for education in North Carolina.

One of our state representatives recently told me of a state worker who chastised a welfare recipient because she had spent a small amount of her check on a little bunch of plastic flowers. The legislator interceded, "Please leave her alone; she needs those flowers. She feels the need of a little beauty in her life." That little incident describes North Carolina for me—its caring and compassion for people.

This—tonight—is caring beyond any description. We like to think that because we love our friends and enjoy our involvement with people so much that we have added to their joy in some ways, but we don't deserve this.

We are so appreciative of our children and our sons-in-law who have inspired us so much, and we feel fortunate to live close enough to our

grandchildren to see them frequently. I like to think that I have brought even a fraction of satisfaction to my grandchildren that they have brought us.

I do wish it were possible to thank individually all the wonderful people, especially my cherished family, who have made it possible for me to live and participate in North Carolina. Thank you all.





RESPONSE

By James H. Semans

Archie Davis is a knight on a white horse who has no need of armor. He is a complete gentleman where courtesy and charm are legendary. His kindness is limitless. With complete self-sacrifice and total self-effacement he brought both the Duke Endowment and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation to North Carolina, saving long term financial burdens and bringing the two institutions close to their beneficiaries. Archie overlooks pettiness everywhere because he is a person who doesn't believe that only the perceptible is real. Idealism, honor and integrity exist as entities for him. Archie, our hearts are filled with gratitude.

This is a truly moving, memorable moment. It will remain in our minds forever. One fact is very clear to me: Of all states I've known in this country, North Carolina is the most fun to work for. Growing up in Pennsylvania, I rarely heard much about *state* projects, and there seemed to be so little unity among the *sections* of the state. Trust and confidence and especially communication seemed to be less than in North Carolina.

My parents were *education-oriented*, and they encouraged me in my pursuit of a medical career even though it might mean living elsewhere. I was fortunate to encounter Hugh Hampton Young, who remained my medical mentor for many years. He introduced me to many extracurricular worlds in which he was involved; and he showed all of his protégés how physician-participation could make a difference in communities, as he did in the state of Maryland.

Coming to North Carolina was refreshing. The privilege of being at Duke University Medical Center brought me in touch with patients and members of the medical staff, many of whom were North Carolinians. Then Governor Sanford gave me the most special opportunity of my life to serve the state as board chairman of the North Carolina School of the Arts. Through this service I met some of the finest friends I have

ever had, and I discovered the deep loyalty which dedicated North Carolinians develop for an institution to which they become attached.

William Schuman, the composer, once asked me why the support of the arts in North Carolina ranks with New York and California at the top of the fifty states. A more general version of this question could also be asked: "Why, despite its very modest per capita income, is North Carolina at the top of all the states in so *many* progressive areas?" My reply is built around the fact that this state really operates for all the people. I have found that North Carolinians really believe in that and have not only wrestled to bring it to reality but are attempting to make up for past inequities. There is also here a refreshing mixture of tradition and looking to the future. Tomorrow is not only a dream. It is built into the reality of today. The state was settled by struggling, hardworking folk, and a plantation economy never developed. People strove toward goals together. There has been a minimum of class distinction. *Instead* of class distinction its *educational system* became the symbol of North Carolina's greatness.

There has been a compulsion—a drive—to make sure that in betterment and in learning *everyone* is included. As a result, institutions, schools, and programs for almost every need have been established.

I have been privileged to see its effect on facets of life such as vocational rehabilitation. Dr. Wilbert Davison, founding dean of the Duke University Medical School, asked one or two of us—who had had training and military experience in the care of those with injury of the spinal cord—to set up a spinal cord injury team and a rehabilitation service at the hospital. This led eventually to my serving on the Governor's Committee for Employment of the Handicapped. It was discovered that through lack of awareness a large amount of federal matching money for vocational rehabilitation was being returned unmatched to the federal government each year. This was funding that could be granted to retrain the physically disabled in North Carolina. Through the strong leadership of Senator Ralph Scott and with the backing of Governor Sanford, a bill to supply the matching money was passed and the full amount was retained for vocational rehabilitation.

In the next administration Governor Moore gave higher visibility to the whole rehabilitation field by establishing a study commission for its development. He paid great personal attention to seeing that many recommendations were implemented and, above all, saw to it that the architectural needs of the disabled were made visible. Now the number

of imaginative programs operating for those with disabilities is phenomenal. This very morning, Governor Martin presented a book, backed by the North Carolina Department of Commerce and just off the press, with a description of every major public and private historic, cultural, and entertainment site in the state, giving its geographic location with full details of its accessibility to the handicapped.

My experience has been that in this state if one just even whispers to a caring person that there is a need, somehow it will be worked out. That responsiveness is one of the greatest traditions a state can have.

The governor, the legislature, and the people have worked in partnership not only for this but for the next generation and for future generations.

Now you can see why I am so grateful to North Carolina—its people and my own family. I was devoted to Mary's mother. We had good times together. By asking me to be a member of her foundation she not only touched me deeply but gave me a new learning experience, an extension of my service as a physician. It is hard to describe the devotion and gratitude I feel for the patience, understanding, and encouragement of Mary and our children. Our pride in them and their families cannot be put in words. Living here with my very precious, cherished family and you extraordinary friends, who came here tonight, and having the opportunity to serve North Carolina, is a dream come true.

Thank you.





Display on Mary and Jim Semans in the North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library.

North Caroliniana Society, Inc.

North Carolina Collection
UNC Library 024-A
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Chartered on September 11, 1975, as a private nonprofit corporation under provisions of Chapter 55A of the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, the North Caroliniana Society has as its main purpose the promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina heritage through studies, publications, meetings, seminars, and other programs, especially through assistance to the North Carolina Collection of The University of North Carolina Library in the acquisition, preservation, care, use and display of, and the promotion of interest in, historical and literary materials relating to North Carolina and North Carolinians. The Society, a tax-exempt organization under provisions of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, depends upon the contributions, bequests, and devises of its members and friends.

Unofficially limited to one hundred North Carolinians who have contributed significantly to the state, the Society elects additional individuals meeting its criterion of "adjudged performance," thus bringing together men and women who have shown their respect for and commitment to our state's unique historical, literary, and cultural inheritance.

A highlight of the Society's year is the presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award to an individual adjudged to have given unusually distinguished service over a period of years to the encouragement, promotion, enhancement, production, and preservation of North Caroliniana.

The North Carolina Collection, the headquarters for the North Caroliniana Society, has been called the "Conscience of North Carolina," for it seeks to preserve for present and future generations all that has been or is published about the state and its localities and people or by North Carolinians, regardless of subject. In this mission the Collection's clientele is broader than the University community; indeed, it is the entire citizenry of North Carolina as well as those outside the state whose research extends to North Carolina or North Carolinians. Its acquisitions are made possible by gifts and private endowment funds; thus, it also represents the respect that North Carolinians have for their heritage. Members of the North Caroliniana Society have a very special relationship to this unique institution which traces its beginnings back to 1844 and which is unchallenged as the outstanding collection of printed North Caroliniana in existence. A leaflet, "North Carolina's Literary Heritage," is available without charge from the Collection.

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